

Section of the History of Medicine

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Papers

Goya's Illness

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Francisco Goya, the great Spanish painter, was attacked by a mysterious illness early in 1793 at the age of 47, which left him totally deaf for the remaining 35 years of his life. Though it will be interesting for us as doctors to speculate upon the nature of his illness, perhaps the most important aspect so far as posterity is concerned is that after he had become deaf the colour and character of his imaginative paintings changed entirely. Now was this change in his pictures from gay to macabre, from colourful to sombre, and from pleasant dream to ghastly nightmare, caused by his illness? The change certainly followed upon his illness which, it has been supposed, affected his brain. Or was it that being stone deaf he rebelled against his fate and this encouraged morbid thoughts, engendered by the vagaries of his private life and the turn of public events in Spain, then at the mercy of a corrupt administration and later exposed to the ravages of the Peninsular War?

Elsewhere I have drawn the comparison between the deaf painter Goya and the British satirist, Dean Swift, who, a century earlier, was subject to recurring bouts of severe deafness and giddiness due to Ménière's disease affecting both ears. Both were creative artists, the one with his brush, the other with his pen. Both were sociable, lively, and popular in high society. Each was robbed of his hearing in middle life, and being forced into loneliness each became a prey to morbid thoughts which may well have affected his artistic output. Goya's imaginative paintings lost their gaiety and colour, and the subjects depicted were often distressing and sometimes horrible. In a similar manner Dean Swift's writings became increasingly bitter as his deafness deepened, and at times were venomous and even disgusting.

But before coming to any conclusion about the effect of Goya's illness upon his artistic output, it will be as well to enquire into his life and into the times in which he lived. In addition we can glean something from the accounts of his illness which have come down to us from his letters.

Francisco Goya was born on March 30, 1746, at Fuendetodos, a small village near Saragossa, the capital of the province of Aragon, about half-way between Madrid and the French border. His father was a master gilder who had retired from Saragossa to the village where his wife's parents, who were of the local nobility, lived.

Goya went to school in Saragossa and there met his lifelong friend and confidant, Martin Zapater. They often corresponded, and it is from the letters they exchanged that biographers of Goya have learnt so much. He had a talent for sketching people which soon attracted attention; and the parish priest, recognizing this talent, recommended that Goya be apprenticed at the early age of 14 to the painter Luzan, who had his studio in Saragossa and with whom Goya stayed for four years. He grew into a sturdy, boisterous and independent lad who seems to have been the ring-leader of a gang of youths, and his escapades led to his being found one night with a knife in his back. This no doubt influenced Luzan to advise his turbulent pupil to apply for a scholarship to the Academy of San Fernando, Madrid, the leading art school in Spain. In this Luzan enlisted the help of a former pupil, Francisco Bayeu, then a painter at the court of Charles III, who befriended Goya. Despite this influence Goya failed to gain entry to the Academy on two occasions, and we next find him *en route* for Italy in the company of a group of bullfighters! In Rome he studied the Old Masters, and in 1771 the Royal Academy of Fine Arts at Parma awarded him second prize in a competition.

But he had to leave Rome in a hurry, once again on account of his wild behaviour. This time he



The Prado, Madrid

Fig 1 *The Game of the 'Blind Hen' (1791)*

got into trouble with the Church for trying to abduct a young nun from her convent. This was a most serious offence, and it was only the intervention of some highly placed friends who knew of his talent that saved him from the death penalty. At all events he returned to Saragossa in 1771 where he received his first commission to paint a series of frescos for the new Pilar cathedral with Francisco Bayeu, with whom he shared the commission. Later this led to trouble between the turbulent and intolerant Goya and Francisco Bayeu, who in 1773 became his brother-in-law when Goya married Josefa, Bayeu's sister.

At this time the German painter, Mengs, was the First Court Painter and as such he was the leader of artistic life in Spain. Mengs invited Bayeu and Goya to execute a series of cartoons of Spanish life to be made into tapestries at the Royal Tapestry Factory of Santa Barbara. These cartoons are still to be seen in the Prado Museum in Madrid, and the tapestries hang in the Royal Monastery of El Escorial. During the following sixteen years, Goya painted almost 60 cartoons for the tapestry factory, all in the gayest of colours, depicting the lighter side of Spanish town and country life in which all the ladies were young and comely and the men handsome and well turned-out. (Fig 1.) But besides these cartoons, which deliberately depicted the rosiest side of Spanish life for the benefit of the court, Goya painted many other pictures in similar fashion,

and gradually he achieved a great name particularly as a painter of outstandingly frank portraits. He was introduced into court circles in 1780 where he quickly became very popular, and was taken up by the heir to the throne, the Infante Don Carlos, and his Italian wife, the Infanta Dona Maria Luisa. In the same year he was elected to the Academy of San Fernando.

Goya's portrait of Charles III painted in 1787, but two years before the King's death, hangs in the Prado and like all his portraits is frank and revealing. Charles IV, who succeeded to the Spanish throne in 1789, treated Goya as a friend and soon appointed him one of the court painters.

Goya was taken up by society in general and by the Duchess of Osuna, and later the Duchess of Alba, in particular. These two ladies with the Queen, Maria Luisa, dominated Madrid society, which they also scandalized with their affairs. The Queen fell in love with a young guards officer, Godoy, by whom she is said to have had her two youngest children. She promoted his interests until he became Prime Minister and eventually an Infante of Spain, when he made a marriage with the gentle Countess of Chinchon, a cousin of the King, whom Goya was later to paint so poignantly. The Prime Minister, Godoy, and the painter, Goya, were firm friends, even to the extent that Goya allowed his mistress, Pepa Tudo, to go under Godoy's protection; this stood Goya in good stead.

Cayetana, Duchess of Alba in her own right and a leading aristocrat in Spain, was sixteen years younger than Goya and a violent rival of the Queen, whom she insulted whenever she dared. Goya fell madly in love with the Duchess and accompanied her when she was banished by the Queen to her estates in the south in 1792. During this time Goya fell ill in Seville and was taken to his friend, Sebastian Martinez, in Cadiz who took care of him. Writing to Goya's great friend, Martin Zapater, in March 1793 Martinez said: 'Goya is slightly better but progress is sadly slow. The noises in his head and his deafness have not passed away; however, his sight has improved and he no longer has fits of dizziness and can walk up and down stairs without difficulty.'

What seems to have happened was that Goya was suddenly struck down with giddiness, sickness, deafness and partial blindness, all of which startling symptoms appeared out of the blue with a chaotic and devastating suddenness. Exposure to cold and over-exertion when trying to mend the axle of a coach in which he and the Duchess of Alba were travelling have been put forward as exciting causes of the illness; but of course in everybody's mind, both at that time and since, was the likelihood that this was the

result of the wild life he had led and there can be no doubt that with regard to syphilis he must have been, as the statisticians might put it, not infrequently 'at risk'.

Nevertheless, the fact that he recovered from the illness, except for his hearing, and lived an active life for another thirty-five years, suggests that this was a sudden episode without any progressive spread of the disease such as would be expected in the later stages of syphilis, either of the nervous or cardiovascular systems. It is much more likely to have been a curious syndrome in which temporary inflammation of the uveal tract is associated with permanent deafness, and often with loss of pigmentation of the hair and skin. To the full-blown syndrome are attached the names of Vogt and Koyanagi, and I have seen 5 patients exhibiting all or most of the features of this disorder. In all I found that the balancing part of the auditory nerve had also been affected, but in 3 there was no loss of pigment in the hair or skin. Nor does there appear to have been any change in the colour of hair or skin in Goya's case, which closely resembles that of a business man, aged 46, whom I saw two years ago because of total deafness coming on suddenly with eye inflammation and severe giddiness and sickness which laid him up for several weeks. There was no loss of pigment in the hair or skin. Within two months of the onset of the disorder his eyes had cleared, but he did not regain his hearing or his sense of balance. My friend and colleague, Mr Keith Lyle, agreed with me that this patient came within the ambit of the Vogt-Koyanagi syndrome, and I believe that it was this syndrome from which Goya suffered. The aetiology of this disorder is not understood. It resembles Harada's disease and sympathetic ophthalmia; and it has been suggested that it is caused by a virus infection. In the cases which I have seen the deafness and the loss of vestibular sensibility have been permanent, though in all the uveitis cleared up without any residual visual defect, and it would seem from the evidence that this is what happened in Goya's case.

By the end of 1793 Goya was back at work and he produced a series of pictures for the Academy of San Fernando, where they may still be seen, and about them he wrote to Martin Zapater: 'So as to turn my mind from brooding over my misfortunes and also to meet some part of the heavy expenses due to my illness, I have now embarked upon a series of easel pictures, in which I am able to include that personal observation which has usually to be ruled out in commissioned works, where so little scope can be given to caprice and invention.' These paintings show early changes both in style and in content; though his portraits continued unchanged. He was

appointed Director of the Academy of San Fernando in 1795, and in 1799 First Court Painter in recognition of the beautiful frescos in the dome of the Church of Antonio de Florida, Madrid, which he painted at the King's command in 1798. These depict the Miracle of St Anthony, and the Holy Office of the Inquisition was offended because many of the figures in the scenes on the roof of the church seemed to resemble well-known and even notorious figures in Madrid society. The frescos can be seen today in this little church by the side of the river Manzanares, which also houses Goya's tomb. Despite his dreadful infirmity he was at the height of his creative power and it was said that some of his portraits were executed at a single sitting of but a few hours.

Then in 1799 came a series of satirical etchings which he called the 'Caprichos'. (Fig 2.) These deeply offended the Church and he might well have been arraigned by the Inquisition had not the King at Godoy's suggestion agreed to accept the plates and have them published.



Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille

Fig 2 *The Old Women* (1817-19)



The Prado, Madrid

Fig 3 *Old Men eating Porridge* (1819-23)

In 1802 the Duchess of Alba died, still at the height of her beauty and fame. They had been a curious and tempestuous friendship. Both of them were impetuous and self-willed, but the ageing and deaf court painter held a constant and binding attraction for the much younger and very beautiful aristocrat. The extent to which she both fascinated and tormented him can be seen in some of the 'Caprichos'.

In 1808, Napoleon's troops occupied Spain and a War of Independence broke out. This inspired Goya's most famous painting 'The Executions of May 3, 1808' which depicts a firing squad of Napoleon's troops shooting a band of hostages, and it is surely one of the most dramatic pictures ever painted.

In 1810 he was working on his etchings of 'The Disasters of War' of which it has been said that they show up war for what it is, disgusting and horrible. In 1812 he painted the victorious Wellington. Because the English General would not sit still, Goya in a fury picked up the General's sword and chased him out of the studio. Yet when at the King's command some fourteen years later Goya sat for his portrait by Vicente Lopez, the unfortunate painter could not dissuade

the aged, irascible and impetuous Goya from constantly jumping up to see how the portrait was going, offering criticisms and even adding a few brush strokes.

Goya's wife died in 1812, and in 1819 he bought a house and small property on a hill on the outskirts of Madrid which became known as the 'Quinta del Sordo'. This house has become famous for the series of Black Pictures which he painted on the walls. (Fig 3.) The most gruesome one 'Saturn devouring one of his children' was, of all places, in his dining room. In 1873 a French nobleman, Baron Emil d'Erlanger, bought the House of the Deaf Man and had the murals transferred to canvas, and they were exhibited in 1878 at the World Fair in Paris.

The war with Napoleon had led to the abdication of Charles IV in favour of his son who was to become Ferdinand VII. Charles with his wife and her friend Godoy, the Prime Minister, made their way to Rome where they eventually died in obscurity. Napoleon put his brother Joseph on the throne of Spain. Joseph tried to rule fairly but was hated by the people who longed for their own new king. They did not know when they were well off, for when, after Wellington's

victory, Napoleon was driven out, Ferdinand VII returned to rule in a disastrous way. In 1820 the reactionary government of Ferdinand VII was overthrown and the King was driven into exile. He returned to power in 1823 to start another series of repressive measures against the liberals. Many leading Spaniards went into exile and Goya followed them in 1824, obtaining leave of absence on the grounds of ill-health. He went first to Bordeaux and then for a while to Paris, before finally returning to Bordeaux where he died in 1828. Even when he was 80 years of age he continued to paint and to sketch, and he was one of the first to take up the new lithographic process. He had always been interested in bull fighting and some of his finest sketches are of this Spanish sport. An earlier series was known as the 'Tauromachia' published in 1816, and a further series of lithographs in 1825, 'The Bulls of Bordeaux'.

During a short visit by Goya to Madrid in 1826, made in order to get permission for further leave of absence from his duties as Chief Court Painter, the King ordered Vincente Lopez to paint a portrait of Goya, now aged 80.

There is mention of an illness in 1819, but no details are available, and it could not have been serious for his artistic output was as great as ever. The year before he died he painted, in the old and gay colours of his younger days, 'The Milkmaid of Bordeaux'. In the spring of 1828 increasing trouble with vision and balance forced him to take to his bed and he died. It is said after an attack of apoplexy, on April 16, 1828.

He was buried in the cemetery of the Chartreuse at Bordeaux in the same tomb as that of his old friend, Martin Goscoechea. In 1899 it was decided to transfer Goya's remains back to Spain, but on opening the disused tomb the bones of the two friends were found to be mixed up and there was only one skull. These remains were sealed up in one casket and taken to Madrid where they now lie in the Church of San Antonio de la Florida. This was the church decorated by Goya, and the people of Madrid depicted in his frescos of the Miracle of St Anthony are a perpetual and lovely memorial to the genius of Goya.

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Padua and the Dawn of Scientific Medicine [Abridged]

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Although secular schools of law and rhetoric had persisted in Italy from Roman times, the evolution of universities was an event of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The principal seats of learning were then called *studia generalia*, meaning schools frequented from all parts. Later, when conferred by papal or imperial bull, the title also gave graduates the *ius ubique docendi* and enabled beneficed clergy to attend without loss of benefice.

The word *universitas* on the other hand meant the whole of any body of men and was often applied to a trade guild. At Bologna, probably some time after 1170, the first Italian student guilds or *universitates* were formed. These soon undertook the payment of the doctors, masters or professors (the terms are synonymous) which formerly had been an individual responsibility. Control over the livelihood of the teachers gave the student university a commanding position in the school, while in the town, where the students might constitute 10% of the population, they had an equally powerful lever since their residence brought prosperity which could be withdrawn by migration elsewhere. By these weapons they were able to secure control within the school over all academic matters except the granting of licences, while in the town they enjoyed civil (and later in some cases criminal) jurisdiction over their own members. By 1200, however, relations between the students and the citizens had become so unfriendly in Bologna that waves of secession followed to Modena, Reggio, Vicenza and Arezzo, where ephemeral schools arose, and lastly to Padua.

The *Chronicles of Padua* (Fig 1) record simply that in 1222 'the Studium was transferred from Bologna to Padua'. Taken without further qualification, this implies a migration of the whole university. Certainly the numbers must have been